

REVOLUTIONIZING HR FOR A WIRELESS REBEL



WHEN YOU'RE THE UN-CARRIER, YOU DON'T FOLLOW THE HERD.

You toss out wireless contracts. You let people keep data. Music streaming is unlimited. International roaming for pennies, not dollars. Upgrade whenever you want? Sure, that too. Call it ridiculous, but since 2013 that's how T-Mobile has been rolling, and the results shout for themselves: From 33 million subscribers in 2013, T-Mobile now has 55 million. And it's adding new customers at a pace no competitor can match.

Still, T-Mobile is a little guy in the wireless industry, working hard to catch wireless duopolists Verizon and AT&T. Unlike those guys, T-Mobile can't spray unlimited bucks around when it comes to marketing and other initiatives.

But T-Mobile has a secret weapon: Great people, and a great culture that allows those great people to deliver exceptional results. At T-Mobile, people matter—they're the company's competitive advantage. When the other guys' employees are watching the clock, T-Mobile's people are listening to customers tell them how to fix what sucks in the wireless industry. The people in the call centers are like ninjas, solving customer problems one after another. Same in the retail stores, where salespeople can't wait to support T-Mobile customers.

How to get even more out of the people advantage? By doing the same thing for employees that T-Mobile does for its customers: Remove pain points. That's the thinking behind a drive to overhaul T-Mobile's Human Resources department of 460 people. The goal was to break from the "usual way of business" in HR, and look at everything HR does with a fresh set of eyes. So now T-Mobile has a new and better way to run its core systems, lead and reward employees, find great new talent; and give employees a stronger voice.

Since its start in early 2014, this HR transformation has been one of the more startling inside jobs in corporate America. It has taken a wrecking ball to traditional HR practices such as assigning numerical ratings to employees and putting them through tedious annual reviews; designing exhaustive company-wide surveys; and perpetuating clunky business processes. It's a clear case of a tiny percentage of a company's employee base—HR at T-Mobile comprises about 1 percent of the employee population—working as a force multiplier for the whole company.

HR wasn't broken at T-Mobile. It was an effective—albeit somewhat typical—HR department. And it was vital to keeping on an even keel a workforce that was seeing some pretty wild ups and downs, notably a failed effort by AT&T to purchase T-Mobile. That bid endured nine months of stormy weather in 2011, then blew away

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like a puff of steam in the desert, leaving T-Mobile flat-footed in a dynamic wireless market.

With all that, morale remained surprisingly high. When then-new CEO John Legere joined T-Mobile in the fall of 2012 and went over the “state of the workforce” with HR’s Executive Vice President Larry Myers, Legere was stunned to find that 78 percent of surveyed employees were “highly engaged” with the company. “You’re putting me on!” Legere exclaimed. “Even with all the PTSD following the AT&T deal?” Myers replied: “I know—it’s amazing. But it reflects the strength of our culture.”

Still, given T-Mobile’s market position, loyalty and engagement alone were not going to pull the company out of its tailspin. The company needed a turnaround. Legere proved up to the task, grabbing the company by the scruff of its neck and shaking it—hard. He began to turn T-Mobile into the “Un-carrier,” launching customer-friendly initiatives such as kicking contracts to the curb, allowing data to roll over, streaming music without a data penalty, and more. Long a company that punched above its weight with marketing, T-Mobile got even more aggressive through 2013, producing edgy TV spots; print ads that featured urban hipsters and a sea of T-Mobile magenta; and adding a game-changing focus on social media.

As if that didn’t keep people busy, there was more. During this same time frame T-Mobile acquired Metro PCS, a prepaid phone brand. It undertook a massive build-out of its network. Plus there were all the usual everyday business things that it took to run the Un-carrier, with retail stores across the U.S. The company was really starting to pick up momentum.

TIME TO STEP ON THE GAS

Within HR, there was a sense that the Un-train was leaving the station. Liz Sullivan, HR senior vice president and part of the HR leadership team, recalls a meeting in a C-suite office where an exec sketched a chart. “He drew a line that curved up—that was T-Mobile the company, the Un-carrier,” she recalls. “There was another line he drew that was sort of flat. That was HR. Right then I knew we needed to do better—it was a mandate to think differently.”

Sullivan wasn’t alone—across HR there was a collective hands-clapped-to-forehead moment, a realization that it was time to start running as fast as the rest of the company. Early in 2014 the HR leadership team began to meet and imagine how to become something different and better. Says Marcine Hull, an HR vice

president who was part of that effort: “If we were going to do things Un-carrier and different, what would that be? It was fun, but it was hard—in HR we tend to be a little conservative. But we had a good role model in John Legere. He wasn’t afraid to challenge the status quo, and that made us feel emboldened. And then we got these really creative directors working on things, and we were just blown away by what they did.”

“If we were going to do things Un-carrier and different, what would that be?”

Adds John Mavers, VP of human resources, who also took part in those initial meetings; “We dealt with questions like whether we even needed HR any more. What is it that’s essential that we can bring? What’s our value-add?”

One important step was to change the core philosophy of HR. At most companies, human resources performs an administration and compliance role. It makes sure federal and state workplace rules are followed; keeps track of employees as they are hired, work, and leave; takes care of payroll, and more. T-Mobile’s HR leaders decided to take a different approach, designing a department that handled the administrative tasks, but in the background. In the foreground it would work to support the company and its employees in a way that would help create success.

Says Dotcy Isom, another VP of human resources. “Back then we had a big Un-carrier poster that said, ‘We’re still a wireless company. We’re just not going to act like one anymore.’ So I had a poster created that read, ‘We’re still an HR function. We’re just not going to act like one anymore.’ And I had that plastered over our meeting room.”

Initially the HR team driving the changes that later were collectively dubbed “Ignite,” cooked up some 40 different initiatives. The HR leadership team took its initial long wish list and narrowed it into a focused, actionable, and impactful plan. By mid-spring 2014 four initiatives had come into focus:

1. **AMP**, for Accelerate My Performance, a set of new ways to handle things such as the annual performance review, which most employees view as being as pleasant as a trip to the dentist.
2. **ReCharge**, a set of new workplace tools designed to simplify everyday tasks such as clocking hours.
3. **Rethink Talent**, a new approach to hiring that will give job applicants more insight into a process often as transparent as a brick wall.

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4. Employee Voice, a way to ensure that employee voices are heard in real time rather than tallied in a once-a-year survey.

Along the way, a major commitment also was made to make **Diversity & Inclusion** a big part of the culture at the Un-carrier. Also, to bolster management ranks in a way that made sense for T-Mobile's business—with thousands of retail employees scattered across hundreds of T-Mobile stores—a major push was made to improve frontline manager training, which became known as **Manager Mastery**.

Coming up with that list of critical initiatives wasn't always easy. Says Ben Bratt, vice president for talent and organizational capabilities: "It was sort of like a family fight at times. But sometimes we had to completely disagree about something before we could finally hear each other."

Drama! Tension! Family feuds! And that was even before the real work began to make Ignite a reality. And this was where T-Mobile's great culture really played a role. From HR's senior leaders, down through the directors, to the frontline HR employees, everyone

"This is a very entrepreneurial company." pitched in to offer their very best ideas, effort, and insight. Says HR vice president Gina Richardson: "This is a very entrepreneurial company. But we're able to take that entrepreneurial spirit and make it work in groups. That's the way it was with Ignite. Everybody aligned to it and worked together while still providing individual perspectives."

It took dozens of meetings and work sessions to refine Ignite and make it a true-magenta product. But what came out of all this is pretty amazing. It's a work in progress, with some of Ignite still emerging from its cocoon. Taken together, the big changes are what T-Mobile's HR people call "signature moves." These are bold steps that stand out—from employee ranks up to the C-suite. They're transformative and, well, are what HR for the Un-carrier is all about.

Some eight months after the first meetings around Ignite, HR began to take its supercharged HR model for a drive. Here's what Ignite came to look like:

AMP: BECAUSE IT IS ALL ABOUT THE SYNC!

It's a feature of much of corporate America, but it's also a bug: The habit of putting employees through time-consuming annual reviews, after which they're ranked for performance, and sometimes stack-ranked against their peers. It keeps on because there's a bandwagon effect from the management gurus and business leaders who write books telling acolytes that this is the right way to do things. "It's all crap," says Larry Myers of the usual way of evaluating and rating employees. "Everybody hates it—the employees, the managers doing the ranking, everybody. But nobody has ever had the guts, the chutzpah, to blow it all up."

T-Mobile never was guilty of the worst kinds of stack-ranking. Still, it blew up what pieces of its review process resembled those long-accepted practices. BOOM!

AMP, the new approach to measuring employee performance, does away with formal, written, scored annual reviews, employee ratings, pay linked to ratings, all that stuff. Instead, it replaces performance reviews with what it calls SYNCs (Supercharge Your Next Conversation). These are informal, frequent, two-way conversations between an employee and manager. It's new and different, but employees and managers aren't left on their own to figure this out. T-Mobile created great resources to help them, such as decks of magenta-themed trading card-like prompters with topics that guide SYNCs. SYNCs are used to talk about performance, coach, set goals and expectations, and give feedback. There's also a mobile app for AMP!

Along with SYNCs, AMP introduced INVEST conversations, which are designed to support an enhanced emphasis on recognition and career development for each employee. As with SYNCs, HR created INVEST discussion guides to help managers navigate the new world of meaningful conversations, not rote reviews. And it put decisions related to compensation on a different track and different time of year.

"Traditionally, people would just leaf through their performance

review to see what the number is at the end," says Myers. "With AMP and INVEST, they really pay attention to what they and their manager are talking about."

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AMP represents a truly magenta way to talk about performance with employees. “AMP really equips employees to rock it, to be super-successful,” says Kim Lupo, an HR vice president who, as a director, helped develop AMP. “It opens up a conversation about employee development that looks forward, not backwards. That’s a real differentiator. Plus it’s easy to use. The language resonates—we’re a wireless company, we know what it means to ‘synch,’ so the metaphor makes sense.”

RECHARGE, BECAUSE THE RIGHT TOOLS MAKE IT EASIER TO GET THE JOB DONE

For years, the hard-working employees in T-Mobile’s payroll function delivered bi-weekly payroll for 40,000 employees with under-the-desk PCs and software designed to handle 5,000. It was that way across the company. Under-investment during T-Mobile’s pre-Legere wilderness years left the company ill-prepared for the growth it began to experience in 2013. Balky tools made everyone struggle to do even basic parts of a job, such as logging time spent at work and updating personal information. “We’ve got people in the call centers that need 90 minutes to manage time for 16 people,” says Myers. “Think of how much more we could get done if we weren’t screwing around trying to get people paid every week. It’s not the fault of our people. The tools they had to work with were terrible.”

ReCharge is the solution—a near-total overhaul of the cogs and wheels that drive T-Mobile’s daily internal work life. It’s not a single initiative but a series of changes, including:

Cornerstone Learning Management System: T-Mobile replaced a decade-old array of training systems with Cornerstone, a single, enterprise-wide solution. Fully implemented in September 2014, Cornerstone supports web-based and virtual instructor training—there’s even mobile functionality for it. It also offers better search capabilities; ties learning to specific job roles; and gives managers the ability to assign specific training to employees. Knowledge! It’s a good thing.

Kronos Timekeeping System: Accurate timekeeping equals accurate pay—so why is it so complicated? To try to streamline that, T-Mobile rolled out Kronos for enterprise-wide timekeeping. T-Mobile’s retail group launched Kronos in the summer of 2014. With the remaining deployment launched in four phases beginning November 2014, Kronos offers the promise of making timekeeping easier and more mobile. And it simplifies tasks such as asking for and scheduling time off. With 46,000 employees, even a few minutes saved each day by each person really adds up!

Workday HR Management System: T-Mobile relied on an antiquated system—MyWorkLife—to handle tasks such as managing personal and job-related employee information. It wasn’t cutting it anymore. So HR started from scratch with a new HR management system called Workday, a system that’s flexible, easy and even fun to use, and that can meet the needs of a fast-growing enterprise. Workday begins its rollout in mid-2015.

ADP Vantage: T-Mobile is growing like crazy, so it’s overhauling its payroll platform in mid-2015 to simplify and improve the employee payroll experience. Talk about the nick of time—the wheezing old payroll system was all but brought to its knees in early February when the payroll team processed the largest, most complex payroll T-Mobile had ever seen: More than \$350 million, some four times the usual bi-weekly payroll. That big payroll was boosted by a perfect storm of annual bonuses, frontline commissions, and stock transactions (the result of a new employee stock plan), giving it a mind-blowing level of complexity heroically managed by T-Mobile’s stellar payroll team. Next time that rolls around, things will be much easier. ADP Vantage also gives employees a simple one-stop shop for managing things such as tax withholdings.

With this big investment, the Un-carrier is hauling its everyday work life out of 2005 and into 2015.

RETHINK TALENT, BECAUSE JOB APPLICANTS ARE PEOPLE TOO

T-Mobile has become a big, high-profile company with a compelling story and high-profile media coverage. That draws job hunters like bees to clover. In fact, more than 1 million people a year drop a resume into the company’s jobs portal. “And that can be like putting it down a black hole,” says Jared Flynn, senior director for talent acquisition.

“Two months later they get a generic email that says ‘You’re impressive, but we picked someone else.’ Or worse, they put in a resume and the very next day get rejected.”

That’s a lousy way to treat people, says Flynn. Especially considering that 98.4 percent of T-Mobile applicants aren’t

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selected for a job. “That means we have maybe a million people who are potential customers, and we’re going to tell the vast majority of them, ‘nope!’” says Flynn. “We need to do a better job of how we communicate with people who want to work for us.”

So the talent team at T-Mobile came up with some things that sound simple but really change the applicant experience. For one thing, the language on the jobs pages is not the usual corporate blather. “This will be a challenging opportunity within a company that values yadda, yadda, yadda.” Instead, T-Mobile developed job descriptions that speak Un-carrier. Here’s an example:

“Welcome to the big leagues. Here, you’re more than a sales person. You’re the face of our company for thousands of potential customers. You’ve got to know your gear inside and out—from the latest phones to the most competitive pricing plans. And you’ve got to bring fierceness and enthusiasm to every sale. It’s a big responsibility, but the rewards are simply amazing.”

That language serves as a challenge to people—it tells them this isn’t a punch-the-clock gig. Right away that helps thin out the number of applicants, so when T-Mobile starts to interview people, the chances are they’ve self-selected to be a great fit for the Un-carrier.

Other tweaks were made to the listings. One tells applicants the number of days the job has been listed. Another details the number of candidates who have applied. That gives people a chance to figure their odds. Maybe the job has been open for six weeks and 85 people have applied. Number 86 may say, “Hmmm...well, maybe I’ll look for something else.” Or, “Meh, I can rock this—I’m in.” Either way, it’s a more informed decision.

Lastly, T-Mobile added helpful things such as a snazzy infographic that gives applicants a clear picture of T-Mobile’s hiring process. In addition, there’s a “you are there” video of what the role looks and feels like. That helps people really understand what it means to be on Team Magenta. Because who wouldn’t want to be?

EMPLOYEE VOICE, BECAUSE WHAT EMPLOYEES SAY REALLY IS WORTHWHILE

Marketing and product people are working at warp speed, coming up with new Un-carrier moves, snapping up the latest great wireless products to push into stores, reacting to competitors while simultaneously trying to out-flank them. In that atmosphere a pokey, once-a-year cadence of surveying employees to see what they’re thinking just doesn’t make sense.

So the fourth signature move is called simply Employee Voice. It’s a super-sleek, super-agile approach to surveying employees at frequent intervals, with the goal of taking a constant pulse of the company. Call it Un-surveying. It comprises two elements:

“Ready to Rock It” Surveys. Surveys at the Un-carrier are short, sweet, and focused on what leaders need to know to stay on top of what employees are experiencing. The goal is to maximize participation by making surveys easy to complete, with only 11 questions and a write-in comment. Three minutes—done! Plus the surveys are mobile-friendly. Employees get a week to complete the survey, and each employee gets surveyed twice a year. Results are then compiled quickly and sent to leaders. “It’s a sample across the organization, a frequent pulse of the workforce,” says Terry Connell, director for workforce strategy and insights. “It feeds leaders with monthly information that says, ‘here’s the general condition and enthusiasm, the excitement and the engagement of the workforce.’” Moreover, data collected in near-real-time will help T-Mobile leaders make changes that reflect the current condition of the company, not the way it was 10 or 12 months back as is often the case with traditional employee surveys.

Social Media and Hashtags. It’s Twitter’s world. We just live in it. T-Mobile CEO John Legere is a Twitter fanatic, with north of 1.2 million followers and nearly 11,000 tweets to his credit. So a new tool will pay close attention to Twitter hashtags and trending topics that involve T-Mobile. For instance, #BeMagenta received a ton of traffic in March after T-Mobile announced a new employee stock purchase plan. “What are the themes? What are the patterns?” says Connell. “We think we can sift through there to find important topics.” Yammer and other social media also will be part of the mix.

Listening, in real time. What a concept!

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OH, TWO MORE THINGS: DIVERSITY & INCLUSION AND MANAGER MASTERY

The four signature moves are the current big play by HR at T-Mobile. They're meant to be transformative and say to the company, "We're with you all the way, at any speed." But on a parallel track there are two other big pushes T-Mobile's HR ninjas have been working on. These are a real effort to ensure that the Un-carrier is among the most inclusive, diverse companies in the U.S.; and that its managers have real, useful tools to help them and their employees rock their jobs.

Diversity & Inclusion is the banner headline over the first of those. Diversity and Inclusion has always been in T-Mobile's corporate DNA. But beginning in 2013 and accelerating through 2014, it put that commitment into overdrive. The goal is to give everyone at the company the chance to be exactly who they are, and to feel 100 percent comfortable with it. Says Holli Martinez, HR director leading the diversity charge: "When I see an employee

"I want them to be who they are, and then let's get to work."

with a tattoo, I like to ask them when they felt comfortable showing that tattoo at work. Same goes for someone who is

gay. I don't want them to feel they can't say that even though they're a woman they have a wife, or a guy a husband. I want them to be who they are, and then let's get to work."

One of the really great elements of Diversity & Inclusion, magenta-style, is the creation of a company-wide set of 31 employee networks and chapters. These are local employee communities centered around something members have in common or aligned with, such as being a veteran, or a member of the LGBT community, or women's leadership, or multicultural. These networks get together to hold special events, work on leadership development, reach out to new employees, participate in Pride parades, you name it. And it's all based on what the network members think is important. In 2014, for instance, members of the Pride network worked with the company to make the commitment to sponsor certain Pride events in select markets and make a very loud and public statement that T-Mobile is LGBT friendly—both as a wireless carrier and as a place to work. Whatever makes a difference!

Diversity & Inclusion feels great, but it also makes great business sense. Employees who feel welcome are comfortable bringing their real self to work. When they feel accepted and included, then can pour their energy into making a difference rather than worrying

about how they are viewed. For another, the United States is a far more diverse place than it was 50 years ago. It only makes sense that T-Mobile reflects that. "If someone who speaks Spanish walks into a store, they'll look for someone working there who also speaks Spanish," says Martinez. "That makes for a better match between a customer and the employee that customer is working with."

A second headline is **Manager Mastery**, which is designed to take novice managers and make them effective leaders. Launched in March 2015, Manager Mastery has a 2015 goal of hitting 42 T-Mobile markets, conducting more than 216 sessions, and connecting more than 4,500 managers. Whew!

So what makes it different and Un-carrier? Manager Mastery is designed to make leadership training real, and make it useful. No dull lectures. It's cross-functional and cross-level, so participants hear and learn about the very best stuff being done by people with other job functions, as well as people who are above and below them in the company hierarchy. Because everyone's ideas are valuable and can make a difference.

Before attending a two-day workshop, Manager Mastery participants are primed to make it a great experience through quick web-based trainings and completion of a competencies worksheet. Afterward, participants meet with a manager to debrief. The idea is that things people learn in Manager Mastery are meaningful—and that they stick. Says Melissa Davis, senior director for talent development: "Our goal of a singular customer focus requires managers to be really good at empowering employees to make decisions that are in the best interest of the customer. It takes a skilled manager to do that. We think that Manager Mastery is going to create a set of managers who build that kind of environment." Plus, Manager Mastery ties in nicely with AMP, which creates a great new way for managers and their employees to talk.

OK, SO WHAT DIFFERENCE IS THIS ALL MAKING?

Ignite, T-Mobile's supercharging of HR, is a work in progress. Parts of it are still rolling out in spring 2015; others remain too new to see where the impact will be. And yeah, there have been some minor misfires. That's probably inevitable when running as fast as HR has been running.

Clearly the most robust of the signature moves is **AMP**, which launched in early 2015 and immediately caught the imagination

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of people who have used it. AMP is changing how managers and employees talk with one another, and opening up surprising new discussions. Kim Lupo, for instance, talked to a manager who had recently engaged two employees in a SYNC session labeled

What do you love about your job and would like more of, and what do you loathe and want to do less?

“Love & Loathe.” Simply put, the conversation is: What do you love about your job and would like more of, and what do you loathe and want to do less? Turns out one employee was really good at data auditing, so her team kept dumping it on her.

She was bummed out and wanted less. Another employee also was good at data auditing... but wanted to do more! So two slightly disgruntled employees became two much happier employees.

AMP also has proven to be flexible enough to accommodate different manager styles and different teams. In Denver, for instance, Reuben Toll manages a nine-person engineering team that has the vitally important task of designing and upgrading switching sites, data centers, cooling systems for big network facilities, and so on. More left-brain work one could not find. So at first, AMP felt a little, well, touchy-feely. “There was a little bit of confusion at first over what AMP meant and what tools we’d work with,” says Toll. “So we adopted a hybrid, using elements of AMP but with more measurable goals that reflect our work. And I ask people if they want to make the SYNCs formal or informal.

“AMP is certainly a lighter touch and is not nearly as onerous a time drain as the old process,” adds Toll. “And things like ‘love and loathe’ really change the conversation. My people have a lot on their plate, and AMP takes some of the pressure off.”

Marilyn Keys, an HR generalist who works with a technical team in T-Mobile’s Snoqualmie, Wash., engineering office, says that AMP’s support materials help a lot. “The cards and the app make it really easy to understand AMP and communicate its features to the people I work with,” she says. “The app in particular is great because it can be updated in real time with new SYNC conversations and things like that.”

ReCharge is mid-rollout. The biggest implementation to date has been Kronos, the timekeeping system. For frontline employees who need to manage their time on the fly, Kronos has been wonderful. “Our goal is to pay people the right amount the first time, every time,” says Angie Fischer, an HR director who helped

manage the Kronos roll-out. “With the old system that was just so hard. With Kronos, we listened to what people wanted and incorporated that. A big part of that was a mobile experience, and we built that in.”

Kronos has greatly reduced the time managers and employees in retail stores and call centers needed to manage timekeeping. Says Mark Davis, a vice president for customer service who works extensively with those folks: “It really cuts down the cycle time needed to log hours, and that translates into real money. It’s intuitive and easy to use, and really is a great example of giving people the support they need so they do what they need to do quickly, then focus on our customers.”

Cornerstone also is in place for distributed and online training, and is creating a more streamlined and efficient training experience.

Workday isn’t live yet, but a lot of people have worked with it before and are thrilled to be back on board with it. “It’s really going to remove the inefficiency of just trying to take care of basic business,” says Paul McMeen, senior director for HR systems and services. “If you need to do a transaction you just do it—you don’t have to think about it.”

Much of **ReThink Talent** is in place, and while it’s still fairly new it seems to be having an impact. Its potential is big. For instance, Jared Flynn thinks the more (brutally) honest job descriptions have led to more of the right people applying for positions. There’s also less candidate frustration because they have a better idea of what’s going on behind the curtain.

Employee Voice is just spooling up, but early returns suggest the new approach is creating the hoped-for benefits. Based upon the size of an organizational division, T-Mobile now can gather “pulse feedback” as often as monthly to stay current with our employee engagement versus data from a past point in time. T-Mobile also now has the ability to create deep-dive surveys that gather data at a very detailed level if the short surveys suggest there may be areas that demand more feedback. Says Rosemarie Orrell-Dubaz, vice president for HR: “I just did a quick survey in my group and got some great results. If I want to go in and in three months or six months do another ‘pulse,’ I can do so just like that. Hey, we seem to be doing great right now but that could change. And now we’ll know.”

Diversity & Inclusion is having a positive impact across T-Mobile’s widely distributed 46,000-person work force. And it’s creating some great stories. In 2013, for instance, the Human Rights

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Campaign gave T-Mobile a Corporate Equality Index score of 60. That score now is 100. That's a great marketing tool—it tells current and future employees that T-Mobile is a different kind of company, one worth working for, as well as purchasing wireless products and services from.

People also are telling great stories about their experiences at T-Mobile. In March 2015, for instance, the internal T-Mobile news site, OneVoice, ran an article about Loren Kettering. Loren had contracted multiple sclerosis, a disability that caused her to lose her prior job. But one of T-Mobile's recruiters made a habit of talking to people at a local community center that helps people like Loren, discovered Loren, and offered her a job at the T-Mobile call center in Bellingham, Wash. Loren has rocked it, and was moved to send a letter to CEO John Legere that said in part: "Now, because of T-Mobile I have more than hope, I have a future. My disease is no longer dictating my life, I am!"

Manager Mastery also is starting to re-shape the company culture. Amy Cole, a retail store training manager in Georgia, went through a Manager Mastery session early in 2015. "I loved it," she says. "I thought it was very inspirational when it came to my style and how I lead. In the session we had a senior manager and director-level managers and people from Metro PCS (a hot T-Mobile brand that sells prepaid wireless packages), and we were able to bounce best practices off each other.

"It really got us to see that we were all on the same side. And it gave me a real road map for how I could take someone who is underperforming and show them how to meet their goals, then really rock it."

THE BIG PICTURE—IGNITE AIMS TO MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE

Ignite is in some ways absolutely a product of the Un-carrier and its particular culture. "T-Mobile people were willing to completely throw out the old rulebook and invent what they wanted HR to look like," says Gina Richardson. "There are other companies in the U.S. that could try this, and it wouldn't work." That said, Ignite also could be a lesson for much of corporate America. T-Mobile is much like other companies in that it has a far-flung workforce, a huge customer-service component, and the need to adapt to changing technology. Ignite offers a blueprint for how to create an HR department that truly supports the frontline people managing those elements.

"Ignite isn't about HR trying to enable a workforce—that's old school thinking with an HR-centric focus," says Liz Sullivan. "Ignite is about seeing through the eyes of employees and managers, reducing hassles for them and equipping them with what they need to be successful."

Already, EVP Larry Myers believes, the way T-Mobile engages with its 46,000 employees is having an impact. "I think it's driving the bottom line right now," he says. "What creates the difference in terms of market momentum? People. At the end of the day it's the heartbeat of our people that makes the difference. All the other factors are pretty much in balance compared with our competitors."

Certainly T-Mobile's 2014 financials indicated something was going on: It was the fastest-growing wireless company and delivered a record year of customer growth: More than 8 million customer additions in 2014; Metro PCS now in 55 markets, up from 15 in 2013; total revenues up nearly 20 percent year over year; and more.

For the people within HR, there's also simply the feeling that they are making the biggest difference they ever have in their career. And that's pretty powerful. Says Marcine Hull: "This is the coolest HR department to be working in right now in Seattle. I go to executive roundtables, and there's probably anywhere from 15 to 30 HR leaders from different companies across the Puget Sound, and none of them is doing this kind of stuff, none of them." Adds Ben Bratt: "When I talk to my peers outside this company, and tell them about AMP, and Employee Voice, ReCharge, all that stuff, they just shake their heads. They can't imagine that any HR function has conceived of and implemented that much change. It's mind-boggling to them."

Moreover, Ignite has been more than something HR tossed out to the workforce, only to have it ignored. T-Mobile employees have embraced the change, and understand how Ignite's elements make their lives easier and their jobs better. Marty Piscioti, vice president for field sales, recalls a recent employee meeting he attended. He asked the audience how many had heard of AMP, and instantly nearly every arm shot up. Even though AMP was new, people were aware of AMP, had used it, and loved it.

HR for the Un-carrier. A once-staid department has taken flight. It's working to win big for the T-Mobile employees, who then can win big with customers. That's how T-Mobile is turning the wireless industry upside-down. ■